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New Jersey Highlands Council Begins Public Participation Program

Chester, NJ- The New Jersey Highlands Council has launched the first phase of a multilevel public participation program to involve local and County planning officials, as well as other area residents, in the development of the Highlands Regional Master Plan. These “partnership” events are aimed at ensuring maximum public input during the creation of the Regional Master Plan.

“The only way the Council will successfully accomplish the challenging tasks we have been given is with advice and feedback from people with a wide variety of viewpoints and areas of expertise,” said Council Chair John Weingart.

Over the next two months, beginning with tomorrow’s Highlands Council meeting in Wanaque (Passaic County), the Council will be holding at least one of its biweekly meetings in each of the seven counties within the highlands region. In addition, the Council is asking 88 Highlands municipalities to nominate candidates to a new Highlands Municipal Advisory Council comprised of local officials and community leaders.

“Towns and counties are encouraged to respond as soon as possible. Our goal is to give a seat at the table to as many participants as possible,” said Morris County Freeholder and Highlands Council Vice Chairman Jack Schrier. “The events of our outreach program will offer opportunities for local officials and community leaders to help shape the Highlands Regional Master Plan.”

”In addition,” said Highlands Council Executive Director Adam Zellner, “a series of partnership and technical advisory committee meetings will help to bring an array of groups with varied viewpoints and expertise to expand public participation in the planning process.”

The Highlands Council’s outreach will also include a public planning workshops, to bring public participation into all aspects of plan development. Those events, which are scheduled to begin this summer, will take place during evening and weekend hours, as well as during weekdays, to maximize public participation and will be open to the public.

The Highlands Council is scheduled to vote tomorrow to establish formal standing subcommittees. Weingart, the Council Chairman, noted that he expects the draft resolution, which calls for committee meetings to be open to the public, to pass overwhelmingly.

“Although the Council has to accomplish a tremendous amount of work in a very short period of time,” said Council Chairman John Weingart. “I am confident that we are establishing open and effective procedures that will lead to the best Regional Master Plan possible for the New Jersey Highlands.”

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